Electoral reforms

32 SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Election Commission of India has proposed electoral reforms;

(b) the areas in which these reforms have been suggested;

(c) the proposals, accepted by Government in principle; and

(d) the action proposed to be taken thereon?

THE MINISTER OF LAW AND JUSTICE (SHRI H.R. BHARDWAJ): (a) to (d) In July, 2004, the Election Commission of India has forwarded to the , Government a set of 22 proposals on electoral reforms. These reforms have been suggested in the following areas:—

(i) Affidavits to be filed by the candidates on criminal antecedents, assets, etc.,

(ii) Need to increase the security deposit of candidates;

(iii) Criminalisation of politics;

(iv) Restriction on the number of seats from which one may contest;

(v) Exit polls and opinion polls;

(vi) Prohibiton of surrogate advertisements in print media;

(vii) Negative/neutral voting;

(viii) Appointment of Appellate authority in districts against orders of Electoral Registration Officers;

(ix) Compulsory maintenance of accounts by political parties and audit thereof;

(x) Government sponsored advertisements;

(xi) Political advertisements on Television and Cable network;

(xii) Composition of election Commission and constitutional protection of all members of the Commission and independent Secretariat for the Commission.

(xiii) Expenses of Election Commission to be treated as'Charged';

(xiv) Ban on transfers of the Election Officers on the eve of elections;

(xv) All officials appointed in connection with conduct of election to be included in clause (7) of section 123 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951;

(xvi) Anti-defection law;

(xvii) Use of common electoral rolls at elections conducted by the Election Commission and State Election Commission;

(xviii) Simplification of procedure for disqualification of a person found guilty of corrupt practice;

(xix) Same number of proposers for all contesting candidates;

(xx) Making of false declaration in connection with election to be an offence;

(xxi) Rule making authority to be vested in Election Commission; and

(xxii) Registration and de-registration of political parties.

While these propsals were under examination of the Government, the Chairman, Rajya Sabha referred the subject of electoral reforms to the Department-Related-Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice for examination and report. The recommendations of the Committee are awaited before the Government could take any action.

Steps for clearing pending cases

33. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of LAW AND JUSTICE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to appoint more judges in the High Courts to facilitate clearing of pending cases;

(b) if so, the total number of judges likely to be appointed;